Kentucky Literacy Link

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Inside This Issue:

We invite your questions and your contributions of ideas/lessons that work. E-mail those to rebecca.woosley@education.ky.gov, and we will include them in this ***Literacy Link*** to connect teachers across the state by sharing insights, bright ideas and best practices.

Issues of Interest

What's the latest on the Program Reviews?

The Program Review Process:
A Reflective Purpose and an Innovative Opportunity

Never before have Kentucky schools had such an innovative opportunity to design and develop programs as a component of school accountability. Through program reviews, schools will take time to carefully and systematically analyze current programs, share in discussions and decide the next steps that will have the most impact on student learning.

The Program Review process provides a tool to guide schools in analyzing current programs to identify strengths and areas of need. While the review process encourages deep analysis of current practices, its purpose is to foster a process of **ongoing** discussion and reflection that result in evidence of growth for learners.

Reflection on the program's identified strengths and areas for growth provides the basis for developing a *plan for improvement,* which may become a component of the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan. Although Program Reviews do not reflect individual student success, they provide all students with access to learning at the highest levels. The teams of educators that developed the review process believe that as schools work to implement the components of the review, students will become more successful learners and will be better equipped to compete in a 21st-century world. The process of ongoing analysis, discussion and reflection at the school level is the foundation that makes the review a successful and exciting endeavor.

Program Review Timeline

- In March 2009, Kentucky's General Assembly passed Senate Bill 1. Passage of this bill established the implementation of a Program review to be included as part of a new assessment and accountability model in arts & humanities, writing and practical living/career studies. **At this time, neither the accountability model nor the role Program Reviews will play in accountability have been determined.**

- Beginning in July 2009, Program Review teams developed the tools and the process for arts & humanities, writing and practical living/career studies. These tools will serve a number of purposes, including:

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Program Review (continued)

1. improving teaching and learning for all students in all programs
2. allowing all students equal access to skills that will assist them in becoming productive citizens
3. allowing students to demonstrate their understanding beyond a paper-and-pencil test

- Schools piloting the program reviews were notified in early February 2010 and received initial training by mid- February.

- The Program Review materials (tools and process) are now available to all Kentucky schools at this link: http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Program+Reviews/
  The ***Frequently Asked Questions*** document included at this link is a convenient resource providing clear, concise responses to questions school teams may have during the process of analyzing current writing plans, programs and policies and developing new ones.

Access to these resources will allow all schools to begin planning well in advance of the 2011-2012 accountability cycle. In addition, all Kentucky schools may ask questions or provide feedback at this e-mail address: kdeprogramreviews@education.ky.gov

Writing Program Review Strategies: A Timely *Reading Today* Article

There are many ways schools may structure the writing plans and programs. As a part of that process, the Writing Program Review will provide some insights, as will ideas from other timely literacy resources.

In the February/March 2010 issue of *Reading Today*, Kathryn Au, president of the International Reading Association (IRA), suggests a strategy for involving individual student writers in self-assessment of their own communication skills. She recommends setting up a year-long schedule and implementing a quarterly process when students review communication working folders.

Based on the rubric a school adopts, she suggests having students choose items from their working folders that substantiate their progress in meeting the criteria. (That evidence could come from work students have collected electronically, as well as on paper.) Au proposes that the work students select, and their explanation of *how* it is evidence of their growth, would become a part of the students' portfolios. Whatever plan schools choose, involving students in assessing their own learning and growth is a critical aspect of their learning and growth.

In Kentucky, schools may develop plans that best meet the needs of their own students. The resulting writing policies adopted by their school-based decision making (SBDM) council should be designed to support the implementation of the school's writing program.

Reference:

Au, K. (2010). Help students take charge of their literacy learning. *Reading Today.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association. 27 (4).

What is the news about the new Kentucky Core Academic Standards?

In March 2009, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 1, which required Kentucky's academic standards to be revised. On February 10, 2010, the Kentucky Board of Education officially adopted, by incorporating them into a state regulation, the initial draft of the Common Core Standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening and Language and in Mathematics.

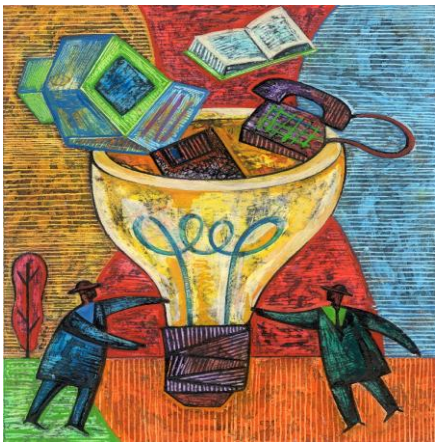
Later that evening, the board met with the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) and the Education Professional Standards Board (EPSB) to adopt a resolution that directed the staffs of each agency to put the final Kentucky Core Academic Standards (the Common Core Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening and Language and Mathematics) into action in their work.

An announcement about the release of the final, revised standards is not expected until spring. When that occurs, this newsletter will provide an update and a link. **Schools and districts are urged not to make final curriculum and instruction decisions based on any early drafts that may be circulating.**

Once the final standards are released, KDE will develop and deliver professional development related to implementing the standards.

Conference in 2010

KRA Conference –*Leading for Literacy* is the conference theme. Conference participants will gather at the Lexington Hyatt and Conference Center Oct. 28-30. Mark your calendars and visit http://www.kyreading.org/Preview.aspx for a conference preview or to submit a proposal to present. Proposals are due May 21.



21st-Century Skills

How can teachers help students develop high-quality collaboration skills?

Communication and collaboration are listed together as student outcomes in the Partnership for 21st Century Skills P21 Framework Definitions Document (http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/documents/P21_Framework_Definitions.pdf). Communication skills often receive more instructional emphasis than collaboration skills. However, students need effective communication **and** collaboration skills to become productive citizens who are successful in their future endeavors. Research published by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) validates the need for collaboration skills. NCREL identifies four categories of critical skills our students need for future success. Teaming, collaboration and interpersonal skills are included as a part of effective communication, one of the four categories of critical skills. Frequently in our classrooms, students have opportunities to communicate by articulating thoughts orally during whole-class instruction. Sometimes, in small group situations, students have the opportunity to engage in a thoughtful exchange of ideas or in collaborative problem-solving.

Whatever the communication circumstance, students construct meaning for themselves and others when they have an option to exchange ideas by expressing their thoughts orally and by listening to each other. When teachers facilitate group communication and collaboration opportunities for students, it's important to first assure that students understand how to collaborate effectively.

Teachers could use direct instruction to teach collaboration skills, but just teaching students what to do will not assure they will know how to do it and why. Instead, designing a series of group experiences that incorporate the target collaborative skills will allow students to experience the skills **and** reflect on why they need to use those skills in group situations. Engaging students in these lessons early in the year will provide them multiple opportunities to practice the skills throughout the year and will allow the teacher to reinforce target collaborative skills, as needed, in multiple learning situations.

The following sequence of lessons is one possible way to initially engage students in lessons that teach, through learner experience, some of the collaboration skills they will need to use and continue to develop throughout the year. Lessons like these examples also will allow students to build skills by processing and reflecting on their collaboration experiences.

Lesson 1

In teams of four to five, give students a task, such as assembling a product with multiple pieces (parts of a square, for example), but do not give any individual student all of the pieces needed to do the task. Instead, spread out the pieces so an individual student needs some pieces from other students in his or her group.

Indicate to the students that they may not reach and take another team member's pieces, but any team member may choose to give a piece to another group member who needs it.

Explain that no one may talk during the process. Be careful to use the word "talk," because they will likely communicate by pointing or through eye contact – and you do not want to prevent them. (Don't encourage other forms of communication; just let them happen as a natural part of the learning/communication process.)

Once student teams successfully complete their task, the teacher should share observations collected on a clipboard about the productive and non-productive behaviors that occurred as teams were involved in the task. (This can be done with a little humor when describing "dysfunctional" behaviors observed, but it is an important feedback for groups.)

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The most critical part of the lesson involves engaging students in processing (discussing, analyzing, naming) what happened during the group experience. As they process what happened, guide students to draw some collective conclusions about "what works" in effective groups. For example, students will conclude that communication is necessary in effective groups. Ask them to describe what communication looked like in this activity where they could not talk. They will likely say: eye contact, all participants leaning forward and engaged in the task and more. They also should conclude that they had to share materials. Lead them to further recognize that "sharing" in future group collaborations may include sharing ideas, insights and possible solutions.

This lesson should take a maximum of 25 minutes. In the future, when students are working in groups, reinforce their use of effective collaboration skills by briefly revisiting the conclusions they drew during this process.

Lesson 2

After students have had the "no talk" collaboration lesson experience, engage them in a lesson centered on a Problematic Situation (PS) – a learning strategy that asks students, usually in teams, to solve a problem. (This strategy is sometimes described as a problem-solution scenario.) Mathison (1989) proposes that this strategy is an important part of stimulating student involvement in a lesson. Teachers may design a PS around content reading or information gathered from other unit activities that inform students.

In order to help students develop critical collaboration skills, the focus of the PS lesson must be on developing effective oral communication skills and on addressing the "no discounting" issue. (Students sometimes "discount" the contribution of some of their peers because of preconceived notions about students' abilities or perceived knowledge. Whatever the bias students may apply, the goal is for them to recognize how much more successful and/or insightful their group will be solving problems or analyzing a situation if they value everyone's contribution and they share knowledge so they can solve the problem collectively.) According to Vacca & Vacca (2002), Problematic Situations foster dynamic classroom discourse that forces students to examine their previous knowledge and experiences and contribute that information to help their collaborative team.

Again, **the most critical part of the lesson** is engaging students in processing what happened during the learning experience. Guide students, as they reflect on what they experienced, to draw some collective conclusions about "what works" in effective groups. As a result of this problem-solving lesson, students will likely conclude that they need to listen attentively to each other; they need to share the task and they need information from all members of the group to solve the problem. Ask them to reflect on what "listening attentively" looks like. They will like respond with something like: eye-to-eye and knee-to-knee with everyone focused on the speaker.

To help students recognize the impact of discounting the contributions made by some group members, structure the lesson so they can "see" how successful they were individually compared to their success as a part of a collaborative team. (This can be done by assigning point values to parts of the solution – not for a grade, but for reflective feedback to groups and individuals.) It could be that one member might have been more successful on his own, but if the teacher structures the measure of success so that students can compare their potential individual success to that of the shared group success, the value of collaboration in effective groups will be apparent to all group members.

Two critical criteria for teachers to include when planning group collaboration experiences are individual accountability *and* interdependence. It's important for students to be able to function effectively in teams, but ultimately their content knowledge needs to be evaluated individually, because individual accountability facilitates formative assessment.

As the year progresses, teachers should continue to reinforce the effective group behaviors students identified each time they begin a new collaborative learning situation. In addition, varying the kinds of collaborative experiences students have will extend the learning potential as it reinforces their collaboration skills. For example, a teacher could divide the class into halves or thirds for some lessons, adding the dimension of the team's need for organization when working in a larger group. To reinforce collaboration skills development continuously throughout the year, always include time for students to process their experience and reflect on the effectiveness of their team experience.

The collaborative experience of today's students, who will need 21st-century skills to become productive employees and involved, thinking citizens, must be developed and nurtured in our P-12 classrooms. Pairing communication and collaboration makes sense, because they are critical 21st-century companion skills. Targeting both in the context of lessons and formatively assessing them as tandem skills fosters student success in the classroom and beyond.

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21st-Century Skills (continued)

References

enGAUGE 21st Century Skills. *Helping Students Thrive in the Digital Age.* Retrieved March 2, 2010, from http://www.unctv.org/education/teachers_childcare/nco/documents/skillsbrochure.pdf

Mathison, C. (1989). Activating student interest in content area reading. *Journal of Reading , 33*.

Vacca, R.T., & Vacca, J. L. (2002). *Content area reading* (7th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Turning the Page

Sharing a Literacy Strategy

Problematic Situations

Problematic Situations (PS) may precede reading, research and other learning activities, generating student interest in a target issue, concept or circumstance. When the PS lesson follows the reading, research and other classroom learning experiences, it gives students a chance to apply what they learned in the PS. In that situation, students synthesize what they've learned during a unit or sequence of lessons with their own personal experiences to solve a problem and evaluate a new scenario through the lens of what they've read and learned.

Setting up a Problematic Situation as a Pre-Reading Strategy

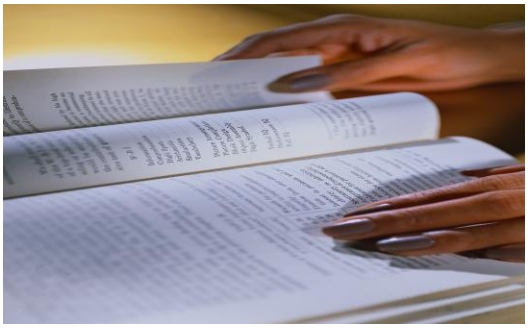
- Decide on a topic from your instructional area and design a problematic situation for students to examine and analyze.
- Write a brief paragraph describing the PS. (You may also use a situation you've found online or in your textbook support materials, if it aligns with your content goals. These also may serve as models for the one you write.)
- Arrange students in groups or in mixed-ability groups. Give all students a copy of the problem, and read it aloud as a whole group first, to ensure all students understand the situation and their task.
- Explain to students that, within their groups, they need to produce a list of possible ways to solve the problem based on what they currently know.
- Ask each team to keep a written record of their solutions along with any explanatory notes that might clarify or justify particular solutions.
- Provide time for all groups to share and discuss their solutions after they've completed their team work.
- After they've completed the problematic solution task, prepare them to use the context of their team experience as they read whatever materials you have chosen for subsequent lessons.

Setting up a Problematic Situation as a Post-Reading Strategy

- Repeat the first three steps of the pre-reading PS strategy.
- Task student teams to use the evidence from their reading, research and other unit learning experiences to solve the problem.
- Ask teams to maintain a written record with explanatory notes that clarify or justify their team's solution.

One way to follow up this activity is by asking students to evaluate the solutions proposed by all teams, decide which proposed solution is best and write a defense of their decision.

Another PS lesson follow-up is to ask student teams to present their solution and their rationale/defense. After they do that, ask individual students to evaluate the solutions in writing explaining and defending their choice.



Suggested Reading

Graff, G., Wham, & Birkenstein, C. (2006). ***They Say I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing.*** **New York: W. W. Norton & Company.**

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Suggested Reading (continued)

This little book can help improve not only students' writing skills, but also their reading comprehension. As they learn to apply what the book refers to as "rhetorical moves," presented in the book as templates, they will begin to read like writers and recognize those same structures in some of the texts they are reading. In the words of the authors, "…this approach to writing has an ethical dimension: it asks students not simply to keep proving and reasserting what they already believe, but to stretch what they believe by putting it up against the beliefs of our increasingly diverse, global society, to engaging in the reciprocal exchange that characterizes true democracy."

Layne, Steven L. (2009). *Igniting a Passion for Reading: Successful Strategies for Building Lifetime Readers.* Portland, Maine : Stenhouse Publishers.

This new publication addresses a concern shared by many teachers – "How do we motivate students to become lifelong readers?" Instead of just sharing ideas about what to do, Layne address the larger question of how to do it with students from kindergarten to high school age.

Check out these links…

http://www.englishcompanion.com/classroom.htm

Jim Burke, author of this site, teaches high school English. Based on his own experience in the classroom, he's written more than a dozen books that share the wealth of his experience and his expertise with other teachers. His site is a treasure trove of resources and tools for teachers. Clicking on "Classroom Resources" when you get to the site and exploring what's there will link you to many student-engaging materials that will keep you coming back for more.

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/

This Library of Congress (LOC) link will take you to the section of the Web site especially for teachers. Resources at the site include lesson plans, video clips, an exciting primary source set, professional development resources for teachers, news and events and so much more.

http://trackstar.4teachers.org/trackstar/;jsessionid=FC66906C043E88D40EF079A84C356926

This link will take you to a Web site where you can design a specific Web search lesson for your students, annotate the sites you select with your directions/questions and keep your students focused on the sites you select for your lesson. You also can type in key words and find multiple Trackstar lessons other teachers have designed.

A sense of belonging provides a foundation on which teachers can facilitate inquiry, collaboration, and deep thinking for students.

Jones, Michelle M. (2009). Engaging Classroom Communities: Belonging, Rigor, and Support as Three Pillars of a Thinking Classroom. In S. Plaut, ed. *The Right to Literacy in Secondary Schools: Creating a Culture of Thinking.* New York, New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Contact Us

Cindy Parker, Language Arts Branch Manager

Consultants and Coordinators

KDE Writing

Rebecca Woosley, High School Writing consultant

Renee Boss, Middle School Writing consultant

Carol Franks, Elementary Writing consultant

KDE Reading

Amy Humphrey, High School Reading consultant

Robin Hebert, Middle School Reading consultant

Pam Wininger, Intermediate Reading consultant

Becca Atkins-Stumbo, Primary Reading consultant

Saundra Hamon, Early Literacy Branch Manager

Early Literacy

Melissa Ferrell, Exceptional Children consultant

Linda Holbrook, Reading First coordinator

Kim Willhoite, Elementary Reading Intervention consultant & Read to Achieve coordinator

Library and Media

Kathy Mansfield, Library/Media Specialist consultant

Kentucky Department of Education

Office of Teaching and Learning
Division of Curriculum
500 Mero Street
Frankfort KY 40601
Phone: (502) 564-2106
E-mail: first.last name@education.ky.gov